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OO RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEH KI #0338/01 0991304
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 081304Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7869
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0021
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: GOMA NOTES: 04/04/08 - GOMA PROCESS: THE JTCPS GETS DOWN TO
WORK AND BACK TO SCHOOL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Amani Program's Joint Technical Commission on Peace and Security (JTCPS) convened for its first working session April 4. Abbe Muholongu Malumalu was very much at the center of things in his role as National Coordinator. Much of what happened must have resonated deeply with the past experiences of at least the Congolese who had been through high school. The only order of business was to establish three initial working groups: 1) Calendar; 2) Provincial Structures; and 3) Internal Rules. The groups then met briefly. Participants seemed a little stunned by the freedom all this has conferred on them, and the level of seriousness is for now very high. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) After the previous day's events, which were largely ceremonial (but important in their own right), the Amani Program's Joint Technical Commission on Peace and Security (JTCPS) convened for its first working session April 4 at 1500 at the secluded Ishangu Hotel. FARDC General (a title he prefers to his official designation as Vice Admiral) Didier Etumba assumed his role as co-chair, but Abbe Muholongu Malumalu was very much at the center of things in his role as National Coordinator. The other co-chair was Jean-Michel Dumont, for the EU, which left the U.S. delegation somewhat perplexed, as MONUC is the Commission's designated co-chair. MONUC was almost totally absent, with only a lieutenant colonel and a junior political officer in attendance.

¶3. (SBU) The 1500 opening was arranged by Dumont in a phone call to Abbe Malumalu instead of the planned 1100 start in order to accommodate International Facilitation commitments at the weekly meeting of the Joint Monitoring Group Task Force (JMG-TF). Within the Facilitation, only the U.S. has the personnel on the ground to cover both processes at the same time. In terms of senior representation, even MONUC does not, so the entire JTCPS rearranged its schedule accordingly and the signatories had to hang around all day. This may not have been entirely a bad thing, as it appears a lot of behind-the-scenes prep work went on while several of the facilitators were sweating out yet another JMG-TF.

¶4. (SBU) Once everyone was in place, execution of the meeting was vintage Malumalu. As always, the Abbe had worked out his stage-setter. In this case, and before any other words were spoken, it was the distribution to the assembled members and functionaries of their letters of appointment, accompanied by a copy of the special issue of the Journal Officiel that had been custom-printed at the his behest and that included under one cover all the Amani decrees. In his softest voice, the Abbe read out each name, and those called approached the high table to receive their letters of appointment from the hands of the JTCPS's permanent secretary, Maitre Rene Abandi of the CNDP. The high symbolism of the moment can have been lost on no one, and the members-or-other-functionaries stepped forward much like (and this can't be entirely fortuitous) parishioners taking communion.

¶5. (SBU) The rest of the afternoon proceeded much like the first day of school -- perhaps the first day of junior high, with the pupils coming from a variety of primary schools. Again, much of what happened much have resonated deeply with the past experiences of at least those who had been through high school: in Congolese high-school terms, the Abbe Recteur made a few wise comments, then the Proviseur (General Etumba -- or maybe he was the Prefet de discipline) proceeded to dress the pupils down and straighten them out: Be punctual! Behave yourselves! Stick to the tasks ahead of you! Get your work done! Our job is to bring peace to this country! Don't you realize that the distinguished members of the Facilitation have other things to do? All of this interspersed with ritualized jokes of the heavier-handed francophone variety that everyone had heard hundreds of times before and was still required to smile at.

¶6. (SBU) Not that everyone there had been through high school: one of the few, timid comments from the floor was from a Mai-Mai member worried that not everyone spoke French that well and that there might be a need for interpreters. The Abbe stepped right up to this one with his most winning and tolerant smile: who needs interpreters when you have each other? Help each other! Sit with those who don't have enough French and make sure they understand!

¶7. (SBU) It all worked perfectly: the conditioned reflexes clicked in, and the pupils remained on their best behavior. One unruly pupil did begin something that might have evolved into a rant, but he was cut off drily by General Etumba: "Je vous retire la parole." And, in terms of unruliness, that was that, at least for the day.

¶8. (SBU) The school in session, though, turned out to be of the more

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progressive kind: the first and (aside from the bestowal of the letters of appointment) only order of business was to establish three initial working groups: 1) Calendar (a reworking or -- it is to be hoped -- a total rethinking of the original Acte d'Engagement calendar; 2) Provincial Structures; 3) the ever-delicate Internal Rules. Each of you will sign up for one of these groups. We set no schedule or timetable, but we expect at least one of the groups to have its assignment done and ready to present to the rest of us on Wednesday, and we expect all of you to have completed your assignments by next Friday. Naturally, each group will probably want to name a moderator and a rapporteur. We will also have resource people, who are NOT voting members of the Commission, don't worry, but we need their help, so don't be surprised if some of these show up to help you in your work. Choose which group you want to join, come up to the table when you have made your choice and sign the appropriate list. Set your own hours, work at your own pace.

¶9. (SBU) At this point, a hand was raised from the floor: Sir, wouldn't it be best if the provincial caucuses could get together to figure out who would be most appropriate for each group? Ah, the Abbe replied, that sounds like a good idea, let's take a break and, if you wish to, by all means caucus in your provincial groups. It would be astonishing if this exchange was unanticipated.

¶10. (SBU) The provincial groups duly withdrew into caucuses, and there ensued about 40 minutes of earnest discussion between the members of armed groups (and of the provincial governments) who had a few months ago been at each others' throats (but who do have the not-dissimilar experience of the Goma conference between them, or most of them), or at least have been (and still are) at the throats of the civilian population.

¶11. (SBU) When the session resumed, attendees stepped shyly forward and signed up on one of the three lists, with the Abbe, the General, the Permanent Secretary and assorted dignitaries (including 8th Region Military Commander Vainqueur Mayala, North Kivu Vice-Governor Feller Lutaichirwa -- the South Kivu regional government was notable by its absence -- and, of all people, Bizima Karaha, at whose feet all of Goma once trembled) looking benignly on. By no conceivable coincidence, each list ended up with exactly 11 names, with

provincial and armed group representation, inevitably and predictably, evenly distributed, the ingenious device of having three (not two or any multiple thereof) working groups ensuring maximum brassage.

¶12. (SBU) The meeting reconvened, and were given further ground rules by the Abbe himself: the working groups were established, now the work begins. This is a technical (he emphasized) commission, and I remind you that you have specific tasks to plan and oversee: disengagement, demobilization, brassage, social reintegration, and the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees. We are not here to do politics -- if that's what you want to do, go find another forum. We require reasoned arguments, not overweening position statements. And we require confidentiality. Keep everything to yourselves, but be sure to share among yourselves and within your organizations: I don't want to hear that someone in some organization is upset because he quote-unquote hadn't been informed of something we have discussed or decided. Now, go meet in your groups and get organized. I'll be contacting all of you individually in the coming days, but as for any plenaries, see you next week. The U.S. added that the working groups must think of themselves as temporary, and that once their tasks are done, members will go on to other tasks in other groups. The Abbe nodded approvingly.

¶13. (SBU) The groups then met briefly. Some chose chairmen (there is not a single woman in any of this), others decided to do this the following day. In the Provincial Structures group, the only decision was to meet at 9:00, and the only discussion was about whether this would be decided by a show of hands (democratic, but favoring those who stay in Goma) or by reasoned argument (favoring those who have to travel some distance, and who have a case to make). The group had both -- reasoned arguments led to a conclusive show of hands in favor of 9:00, showing solidarity. Other groups will meet at 9:30. There are no agendas and no scopes of work, but it would not be surprising if there was a bit of technical assistance at some point.

¶14. (SBU) Comment. Participants seemed a little stunned by the freedom all this has conferred on them, and the level of seriousness is for now very high. As for the International Facilitation, in a progressive-school environment like this, we will ideally be in the background. To continue the Congolese high-school analogy, for now

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we are the surveillants. End comment.

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